

noted that the committee report includes \$1 million for land acquisition in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area requested by our colleagues, Mr. BLUMENAUER of Oregon and Mr. BAIRD of Washington. I would like to clarify with the chairman that it is not his intent that these funds would be spent on land acquisition in the part of the scenic area that I represent.

Again, I would be happy to yield to the chairman on this question.

Mr. DICKS. That is correct. The earmark in the committee report is for land acquisition in areas of the scenic area represented by the two gentlemen who requested the funding.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I thank the chairman. I appreciate very much your comments. I look forward to working with you on issues related to the implementation of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Act.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Rules Committee, by a voice vote, approved an open rule for the consideration of the Department of Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriation Act. I am pleased that this rule keeps with the longstanding tradition of allowing an open debate on spending bills. I support House Resolution 514.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the underlying legislation moves our country in a better direction, providing improvements long overdue to our entire Nation. Our investments today will ensure that our children and grandchildren will have water and air that is cleaner, natural landscapes and historic structures that are protected, and arts and humanity centers that are bolstered.

This bill fulfills past due obligations to our underserved communities and to our entire planet. Republicans in the last Congress and in the current administration have continued to fail to effectively fund the environmental and conservation needs of the American people and its natural resources.

Today, under the Democratic leadership, we are reversing this trend and restoring funding to vital programs and agencies, fulfilling our promise to this Nation and to this Earth. The investments this bill makes are of vital importance today, and their benefits will be felt for years to come.

I urge a "yes" vote on the previous question and on the rule.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2643, and

that I may include tabular material on the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

PERMISSION TO REDUCE TIME FOR ELECTRONIC VOTING DURING CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2643, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that, during consideration of H.R. 2643 pursuant to House Resolution 514, the Chair may reduce to 2 minutes the minimum time for electronic voting under clause 6 of rule XVIII and clauses 8 and 9 of rule XX.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 514 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2643.

The Chair designates the gentleman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and requests the gentleman from New York (Mr. McNULTY) to assume the chair temporarily.

□ 1106

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2643) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes, with Mr. McNULTY in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Washington (Mr. DICKS) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I have waited 30 years for the honor of presenting an Interior and Environment bill to the House of Representatives as subcommittee chairman. I am very proud to present H.R. 2643 to the committee as my first Interior appropriations bill.

The bill includes \$27.6 billion for the Department of the Interior, the Envi-

ronmental Protection Agency, the Forest Service, the Indian Health Service and Related Agencies under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. This is an increase of \$1.193 billion over the 2007 enacted level, or about a 4.3 percent increase.

Mr. Chairman, the recommendations reflected in the 2008 Interior bill are the product of a very deliberate and bipartisan process. Our Interior and Environment Subcommittee held 38 separate hearings over 3 months with more than 250 witnesses. The printed record of these hearings is included in eight volumes, totaling over 10,000 pages.

During these hearings, we heard from agency officials, Members of Congress and more than 100 Tribal leaders and other public witnesses. This testimony made it clear that substantial increases in environmental and conservation programs were badly needed. These sessions also highlighted the critical health and education needs in Indian country.

While the Office of Management and Budget and other Members of the House may criticize the overall size of the bill, I do not know of one increase in this package which can't be fully justified based on need or on the ability to spend the money wisely. Frankly, I don't think I have to remind Members that this bill started in a deep hole created more than a decade ago.

As Members have heard me say many times, and as this chart clearly demonstrates, in our hearings and other statements on the floor, between 2000 and 2007, based on OMB's own tables, funding for the Interior Department fell 16 percent in real terms. EPA has been reduced by 29 percent, and the Forest Service nonfire budget by 35 percent when adjusted for inflation. Given that history, I believe the 4.3 percent increase in this bill is well justified.

I might just mention that one of the most important powers that Congress possesses is the power of the purse. This is in the Constitution. This is one of Congress' major authorities and one way we can check the actions of the executive branch.

Now, while I do not go into all the details, a few of the increases and decreases deserve special mention this morning.

□ 1115

The bill provides a \$223 million increase for our national parks, as proposed by the President, for the 10-year, \$3 billion Centennial Challenge effort to restore the parks for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Park Service in 2016. The additional funds will support 3,000 badly needed new seasonal employees and 590 year-round staff. We also provide \$50 million of discretionary funds for Centennial Challenge projects to be matched by private funds. These funds will support enhancements at our parks beyond the funding necessary for core operations.

We provide a \$56 million increase for our national wildlife refuges, a 14-percent increase above the fiscal year 2007